UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.115/SR.639
10 May 1990

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 639th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 8 May 1990, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. GAMBARI (Nigeria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

2. The CHAIRMAN said that Mr. St.-Phard (Haiti), Vice-Chairman of the Committee, had been recalled to his country; the Committee greatly appreciated his contribution to its work.

3. After consultations among members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the officers of the Committee had proposed that Ms. Thorpe (Trinidad and Tobago) should be elected Vice-Chairman.

4. Ms. Thorpe (Trinidad and Tobago) was elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee by acclamation.

5. Ms. THORPE (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the critical events in South Africa presented the Committee and the international community with many challenges, not least among them the fact that resistance to the imposition of mandatory comprehensive sanctions persisted, and that there were moves to relax even the limited sanctions in effect at the very time when they had begun to bear fruit.

6. The CHAIRMAN suggested that Mr. Gbeho (Ghana) should be re-elected Chairman of the Sub-Committee on the Implementation of United Nations Resolutions and Collaboration with South Africa.

7. Mr. Gbeho (Ghana) was re-elected Chairman of the Sub-Committee on the Implementation of United Nations Resolutions and Collaboration with South Africa by acclamation.

8. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the election of the Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Developments in South Africa should be deferred, pending further consultations.

CONSULTATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS

9. The CHAIRMAN said that it was an honour to be able to welcome the Committee's special guests at a time when change was occurring in South Africa. In recent days, a successful meeting had been held between the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) and the Government, with a view to removing the obstacles to negotiations. The Committee had been greatly encouraged by that development, which it regarded as a step towards non-racial democracy in South Africa. A few months earlier, the General Assembly had adopted the Declaration on Apartheid and Its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa (resolution S-16/1), which called upon Pretoria to take a number of steps towards allowing free political activity as a prerequisite for genuine negotiations. The discussion between ANC and the

(The Chairman)

Government had increased the possibility that a further condition would soon be fulfilled, namely, the release of all political prisoners. Pretoria had also undertaken to review the existing security legislation, and had reiterated its commitment to work towards the lifting of the state of emergency. The shared commitment of the Government and ANC to reduce the level of violence was also very encouraging.

10. In recent weeks, the Committee had been concerned at the violence displayed by the police and at the tragic conditions in Natal province. It hoped that those matters would be resolved as quickly as possible. As pointed out by Nelson Mandela, the apartheid system remained intact in South Africa. Accordingly, it was more necessary than ever to maintain sanctions and other measures aimed at putting pressure on Pretoria. The Committee hoped that at their forthcoming meeting with Mr. de Klerk, the nine leaders of the Western European countries would remain steadfast in their commitment, and make it clear that much more remained to be done before there could be any possibility of relaxing sanctions. More than ever before, the democratic forces in South Africa needed the support of the international community, in accordance with the measures outlined in the Declaration.

11. Father Smangaliso Mkhatshwa, the head of the visiting delegation, had been imprisoned on several occasions because of his opposition to the South African Government. In 1986, he had been detained on charges of subversion and subjected to severe torture, including a 30-hour interrogation while standing. He had taken part in the launching of the United Democratic Front and had been a member of the Mandela Reception Committee.

12. Father MKHATSHWA said that the other members of his delegation were Father Albert Nolan, the author of several theological works, Ms. Nomvula Mokonyane, the Transvaal regional co-ordinator of the South African Women's Federation, and Mr. Charles Villa-Vicencio, a theologian from the University of Cape Town. Two others whose arrival was expected imminently were the Reverend Zwo Nevhutalu, a Lutheran minister and respected leader in the northern Transvaal, and the Reverend Molefe Tsele, a Lutheran minister who had been detained for nearly a year because of his political activities.

13. Father NOLAN said that the democratic forces in South Africa were closer than ever before to their goal of dismantling apartheid. The unbanning of political organizations and the release of leaders such as Nelson Mandela meant that there was hope for the future. Hopes were one thing, however, and reality was another. Racism and apartheid were still very much alive in South Africa, and the suffering of black South Africans showed no signs of ending.

14. The apartheid system, one of the greatest disasters of the twentieth century, had created political, economic, social and spiritual chaos. The damage caused to the people of his country should never be underestimated. The fact that people in South Africa killed one another was due to apartheid and its dehumanizing effects.

(Father Nolan)

15. Mr. de Klerk was undoubtedly sincere, and an improvement over his predecessors; however, he was still a product of racist thinking. While stating that his régime intended to establish a democratic form of government and eliminate all emblems of racial discrimination in South Africa, de Klerk remained opposed to the principle of one person, one vote, and rejected simple majority rule, claiming that it would lead to the domination of the minority by the majority. Instead, de Klerk proposed to institute "minority" or "group" rights. However, there could be no democratic system without majority rule. De Klerk was unable to envision a non-racial South Africa. When he spoke of "power-sharing", what he meant was that whites should continue to hold political power while "sharing" it with others. That would ensure that whites also retained economic power. South Africa's racist economy also needed to be democratized.

16. De Klerk differed from his predecessors not because of his sincerity, but because his Government had been forced to respond to pressures. Although sanctions had been effective, they represented only one form of pressure. The black people in South Africa were making their voices heard through an increasing number of strikes, consumer boycotts, protests against all puppet structures, and demands for the re-integration of the "homelands" into South Africa. The fact that negotiations had been scheduled was a victory for the struggle.

17. The aims of the National Party had not changed; it was still concerned with preserving political and economic power for whites as a group. What had changed was its strategy - one of making peace with ANC in order to ensure the survival of white power. Such a strategy could not possibly succeed. Whites would gradually begin to lose their fear and distrust of blacks. The real struggle in South Africa was not between blacks and whites, but between racialism and non-racialism. As the plans for the holding of elections and the drafting of a new constitution proceeded, the need for non-racialism would have to be faced.

18. It was far too early to abandon sanctions or any other form of pressure. The de Klerk régime would give up its goal of maintaining white power only if it was forced to do so. He hoped that the international community would understand that point and act accordingly.

19. Father MKHATSHWA said that violence was a relative concept. The Allies in the Second World War, the Crusaders in the Middle Ages and the French revolutionaries of the eighteenth century had all used violence, although the history books did not refer to it as such. In South Africa, the British, and later the white minority régime, had been responsible for the deaths of thousands of black people, but that was not characterized as violence. However, when black people defended themselves against exploitation, their actions were condemned as violent. To many activists, that seemed inconsistent.

20. Social upheavals were sometimes accompanied by gruesome killings of individuals. Such actions were objectionable, no matter by whom they were perpetrated. The international community, ANC and progressive organizations were concerned at the escalation of violence for several reasons. First, the de Klerk régime had been forced to introduce some long-overdue reforms. South Africa was on

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(Father Mkhatshwa)

the threshold of a new era, and violence, whether from the left or from the right, was recognized by all sides as an obstacle to progress towards a political settlement. Secondly, for progressive and religious leaders, violence was a moral issue. Thirdly, the pro-apartheid forces had been able to exploit the issue of "black on black" violence.

21. The apartheid system had been kept alive by violence. To fight violence was to fight apartheid. From 1984 to 1986, the white minority régime had been on the verge of losing control. The black majority had achieved a high degree of political organization. With the declaration of the state of emergency, many activists had been tortured; however, it was the relative handful killed by black mobs who had captured world attention.

22. Recent months had seen an increase in violence, which had assumed various forms, some irrational and others political. For example, when black people had marched peacefully to demand the resignation of some "bantustan" leaders and the reintegration of the "homelands" into South Africa, there had been violence. There had also been ideological and counter-revolutionary violence among right-wing whites.

23. The violence in Natal province had lasted far too long. Many had died, a great deal of property had been destroyed, thousands had been made homeless, and some had been forced to leave the country because of threats to their lives. There was a danger that the situation might degenerate to the point where the province became another Beirut. Mr. de Klerk had given the continuing violence in Natal as one reason for prolonging the state of emergency in South Africa. The violence had nothing to do with tribalism; all the people involved were Zulus. It was not due to cultural factors, and it was not the result of regionalism; the struggle was clearly an ideological and political one in which political allegiances had been crucial in deciding who should live and who should die. However, the activity of criminal elements and the influence of socio-economic factors fuelled the violence, and the confused nature of the conflict made the apportionment of blame somewhat hazardous.

24. From all the information that had been gathered, it appeared that the Inkatha movement was the chief culprit in the violence. Countless efforts had been made to resolve the problem, but only minimal results had been achieved. Intervention by the police appeared to have exacerbated the situation, with what most witnesses regarded as undisguised support for the Inkatha movement and its warlords, who had acted with impunity. Continuation of the violence was not in the interest of any right-thinking person, but it had to be recognized that there were certain persons who did wish it to continue.

25. According to research undertaken at the University of Natal, the political violence in the province was the result of a struggle for control in that part of South Africa. Attempts to portray it as blacks killing blacks because blacks were violent by nature were very destructive to the anti-apartheid struggle in the sense that they confused the issue. The majority of the people of South Africa, under the leadership of ANC, were doing everything possible to bring the violence in

(Father Mkhatshwa)

Natal under control, but there were other factors that would continue to fuel the violence. It would finally be brought under control only when a political settlement was reached that was acceptable to the majority.

26. Ms. MOKONYANE said that women in South Africa regarded their struggle as an integral part of the whole national liberation struggle. Women had been predominantly on the receiving end of the apartheid system, which had, through its various racial laws, encouraged their oppression and exploitation.

27. Women had been barred from various forms of education because it was considered that they had no part to play in furthering the development of society. Under the Group Areas Act, black women were forced to leave their families to live as servants in white areas, while others, whose husbands worked in mines in the urban areas, had to stay behind to work the land and produce new recruits for the labour force. Under the state of emergency, it had been women who had suffered most: she herself had been detained under the Internal Security Act while pregnant, and had given birth during a seven-month period in solitary confinement.

28. The role of women in the national liberation movement had not been undermined. There had been female members of the delegation which had held talks the week before with the South African Government, and the President of the United Democratic Front was a woman, Mrs. Albertina Sisulu.

29. There was much talk of offering compromises, but after its experience of oppression and exploitation it was not for the black majority to offer compromises. It was for the South African Government to do so through the dismantling of the apartheid system.

30. Mr. VILLA-VICENCIO said that the present phase of the struggle in South Africa was radically different from any previous phase; the old order was dying, but the new order had yet to be born. Action both inside and outside South Africa was very important, for what was done today would determine the kind of society South Africa would become tomorrow. The South African régime had been brought to the present position of transition by internal and external pressure, and he expressed gratitude for the work done by the Centre against Apartheid.

31. There was no doubt that sanctions had been effective, but there was now talk of lifting them. The pressure which had brought the South African régime to the point where it was today had to be maintained in order to ensure the birth of a new South Africa. Lifting that pressure now would be the most fundamental error that the international community could make.

32. The struggle for a new South Africa, and in particular the struggle of ANC, which most people saw as the future Government of South Africa, was and always had been non-sectarian and non-racist, and it affirmed the most fundamental human-rights values adopted by the international community. The struggle was for a South Africa in which all people could realize their full potential and be proud to be and to be called South Africans. It was not a small group of people fighting to

(Mr. Villa-Vicencio)

bring about revolution, but a broad alliance of all South Africans striving to create a new South Africa.

33. There were groups other than ANC involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, and all groups had a right to participate in the political debate and to continue participating in that debate in a new society. But the international community should not allow itself to be deceived by the attempts to advance certain individuals and certain groups as an alternative to ANC, which formed the majority within the struggle for a new South Africa. The extent to which Chief Gatsha Buthelezi was being promoted by the South African régime was precisely the extent to which he did not have the support of the majority of the people. The struggle should not be prolonged by putting forward people who did not represent the majority view inside the country.

34. Repeated references were made to the need to protect minority rights, and to the creation of an upper house of parliament with equal representation of the different racial groups, but it was human rights, individual rights, that needed to be protected. It would be a tragedy if the racist and other forms of division that existed today were entrenched in any new constitution. Attempts had been made to ensure the protection of the rights of the white minority, but in the new South Africa efforts should be made to protect the rights of all people, and primarily those whose rights had never been protected.

35. He was concerned at the extent to which the international community, or some in the international community, regarded the economy in South Africa as another opportunity for ideological warfare between East and West. Any Government that was elected on a democratic platform in South Africa would have a fundamental moral and political obligation to address the issue of redistribution, in order to ensure that those who had been dispossessed regained possession, and those who had been impoverished were brought back into the mainstream of the economy. There was a sacred need for all people to share in the economic riches of South Africa, and there could be no political settlement that was not also an economic settlement.

36. He expressed his gratitude for what the Centre against Apartheid had done in the past, and asked for continuing assistance in the struggle towards a new, democratic, non-racial South Africa.

37. The CHAIRMAN thanked the visitors for their statements and, opening the question-and-answer period, asked if there was a relationship between the theology of liberation and the struggle against apartheid, and what religious leaders themselves should do at the present critical moment in South African history.

38. Father MKHATSHWA said that the struggle for justice was central to all evangelism, and as the struggle continued in South Africa, it was the duty of all church leaders and congregations actively to participate in that struggle. In the past, the church had legitimized the apartheid system with bogus theories, and it was its task now to be actively involved in the struggle to create the new society.

39. Father NOLAN said that although the majority of the people of South Africa would claim to be Christians, all the other major religions were represented as well. Throughout the world and throughout history, religion had been used, or misused, to justify economic and political causes, and that had certainly happened in South Africa, and would have happened whatever had been the majority religion. His theology sought to expose how religion had been misused, and how it could be used to influence people's behaviour instead of being used by them to justify behaviour already decided upon. Religion was supposed to be liberating, not the opium of the people which it all too often was. Although the term "theology of liberation" was not used in South Africa, preference being given to such terms as "black theology", "contextual theology" or just plain "theology", the attempt was being made to demonstrate that religion was a liberating force.

40. Mr. OLEINIK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) asked how the church leaders present assessed the prospects for change in South Africa and the role in that process of the Declaration on Apartheid and Its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa; how they viewed the outcome of the recent talks between the Government and ANC; and what forms they thought the future struggle would take.

41. Mr. VILLA-VICENCIO said that there were no guarantees of success, although it was clear that if the situation was not addressed urgently, it would worsen and all hope would be lost. There was no question that, as a result of pressure on the Government, there was a better chance than ever before of beginning to solve the problems; and as any doctor would advise, one should not change the medicine just when it was beginning to work.

42. Positive signals had been given in the course of the recent talks between the Government and ANC. The real question, however, was when Mr. de Klerk would call a halt to the process of liberation; he was certainly not thinking of handing over power, and the moment of confrontation would come.

43. He himself was reasonably hopeful that the future struggle would be a peaceful one, a struggle through negotiations. The task was to ensure that the movement towards the inevitable liberation did not involve violent confrontation.

44. Ms. ZINDOGH (Zimbabwe) asked Mr. Villa-Vicencio what his message would be to those countries which were planning to establish diplomatic relations with South Africa, or had already done so, on the grounds that Mr. de Klerk was different from his predecessors and was indeed something of a Messiah.

45. Mr. VILLA-VICENCIO observed that, as a preacher, he could say categorically that Mr. de Klerk was no Messiah. True, he was a little more reasonable than his predecessors, but only because his régime had been under more pressure. It was therefore hoped that the countries thinking about diplomatic relations with South Africa would first speak to the great majority of South Africans and ask them if they thought the time was right and if Mr. de Klerk was different. Unequivocally, the answer would be "no".

46. Mr. PIETERSEN (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) urged the distinguished men of religion present not to choose the winners before the race had started. Indeed, they seemed to be out of touch with the actual situation in South Africa, as it had been reflected in the South African press in the past two weeks. An objective survey carried out by Business Day, certainly not a mouthpiece of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) had indicated that if elections were held the following day, PAC would be the winner; and The Times of London had quoted foreign diplomats who had done research among intellectuals in the townships as stating that the majority supported PAC.

47. In any case, the fragmentation of the liberation movement impeded liberation. PAC was committed to presenting a united front against the common enemy. The National Council of Trade Unions had organized May Day rallies throughout South Africa, and other groups had joined PAC in those rallies. Rather than glibly taking sides, religious leaders should try to bring all South Africans together so that they could overthrow apartheid in the shortest possible time.

48. Father MKHATSHWA said that it was certainly not the intention of his delegation to choose winners or losers, but to do everything possible to bring all freedom-loving people together to fight apartheid; he was sorry if the delegation had given the wrong impression.

49. At the same time, religious leaders must look at reality and listen to their people. They were aware of the recent surveys, but did not feel that they should go into the question of their accuracy. All must stand united, keep their eyes, hearts and minds open, and hear what the people were saying.

50. Mr. GUPTA (India) observed that violence was a matter of particular concern, because it could be used by the Government as a pretext to delay the lifting of the state of emergency or the taking of other measures. Given the political nature of the situation in Natal province as it had just been outlined to the Committee, he wondered what specific action was warranted and what the role of the church could be.

51. Ms. THORPE (Trinidad and Tobago), noting that women were not playing a role in South Africa commensurate with their abilities, asked what strategies were planned to prepare them psychologically and attitudinally for action in the later phases of the struggle.

52. Ms. MOKONYANE said that it was enormously important to bring women to the level of self-reliance, self-recognition and self-respect, and the responsibility for that fell also upon men. The traditional exclusion of women from participation was one more form of cultural oppression.

53. Women's organizations took part in the liberation movement, and they raised gender issues as a priority in all liberation-movement discussions. Although they were not heavily represented in the movement's decision-making bodies, a few women had risen to prominence as President of the United Democratic Front, as Patron of the Federation of Transvaal Women, and as members of the ANC National Executive Committee. Within the trade-union movement as well, women's issues were regularly

(Ms. Mokonyane)

raised, especially in the Congress of South African Trade Unions, which had given them priority and involved women themselves in the deliberations. Also, some victories had been won by the Commercial and Catering Allied Workers' Union of South Africa, in the matter of granting benefits to women employed in that sector.

54. During the times of severest oppression, women had risen up through an organization called Women against Oppression, a broad coalition that included white women, women in political organizations, Jewish women's groups and groups such as Women for Social Justice. Unquestionably, one could not speak of full liberation without the total emancipation of women.

55. Mr. GBEHO (Ghana) said that since the adoption of the Declaration on Apartheid in December 1989, there had been considerable debate over whether pressure on South Africa should be relaxed, and the Thatcherite view had gained ground. The testimony just heard from authentic South African leaders was proof of the wisdom of listening to the South Africans themselves.

56. He suggested that the Committee and the Centre against Apartheid should issue the report on the current hearings as soon as possible and circulate it widely, even outside government circles, so that the entire international community could know where the people themselves stood on the best form of international assistance.

57. Mr. MAFOLE (African National Congress of South Africa), noting that the Declaration on Apartheid had requested the Secretary-General to submit a report by 1 July 1990 on the progress made in its implementation, said that the perspective of the religious leaders would be very useful in that regard.

58. Even though as a member of ANC he followed events in South Africa closely, he had found the remarks of the religious leaders very enlightening. He supported the suggestion of the representative of Ghana particularly in view of the disturbing trend towards justifying a lessening of pressure.

59. In the ongoing struggle in South Africa, ANC did not speak of sure winners. The example of Namibia was instructive. The winners in South Africa must be the people themselves.

60. Father MKHATSHWA said that the Harare Declaration would be the basis for future negotiations. He appealed to the international community to increase its long-standing support for the liberation movement in South Africa, since that would ensure an earlier end to the struggle. The United Nations was, of course, concerned with the whole of Africa and success in South Africa would contribute to the liberation of all Africans, so that the entire continent could work in unity for the liberation of all God's people on earth.

61. The CHAIRMAN expressed the appreciation of the Special Committee for the enlightening and in-depth information the religious leaders had provided. The Committee had, over the years, closely co-operated with South African religious leaders, and would continue to work with them and with others fighting for freedom in South Africa.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.